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# **THE MORAL TEACHING OF JESUS**

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# THE MORAL TEACHING OF JESUS

An Examination of the Sermon on the Mount

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THE MORAL TEACHING OF JESUS

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE TEACHING OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

**T**HE SIX ADDRESSES in this small volume, given in Balliol College Chapel last year, were written in the belief that our perplexities about the moral teaching of Jesus, our doubts as to whether it has any real bearing on our practical conduct at the present time, and our frequent disputes as to how we ought to act if we propose to put it into practice, make it imperative that we should think about it more than we usually do. Perplexities about the Sermon on the Mount are not new. That collection of the sayings of Jesus which is contained in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters of

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St. Matthew's Gospel has been both a perpetual inspiration and a perpetual challenge to Christian people. It is referred to often enough both by Christians and non-Christians. There has been continual dispute about certain passages in it; at the present time there is going on in this country widespread discussion of the verses about not resisting evil. But how can we profitably discuss the content of the teaching contained in the Sermon on the Mount till we have got our minds clear as to the *nature* of that teaching. "It was said by them of old time . . . But I say unto you . . ." Does that imply that the Sermon on the Mount is a new set of commandments—a code of moral precepts like the Decalogue in its nature though differing profoundly in the content of

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its teaching ? If this is a mistaken inference—and I hold that it is—what sort of teaching is it ? What is or ought to be its relation to the ordinary moral codes which in practice govern most of our life ? Is it a code of a very exalted and high and abstract kind, or is it something quite otherwise, not a code at all ? If the second alternative is the right one, what is, or ought to be, the relation of this teaching to such codes as we need and use at this and that time and situation ?

If we begin to ask questions of this kind, we shall be at once faced with others. What is the relation of the Sermon on the Mount to the rest of the Christian message or to the moral teaching of the rest of the New Testament ? and, on the other hand, what is

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its place in or its contribution to moral theory? Modern New Testament scholarship holds that among the sources of our Gospels was a collection of the sayings of Jesus as well as a narration of his ministry and passion. The three Synoptic evangelists used these principal sources differently. Matthew put most of the sayings together into these three chapters as though they had all formed one discourse; the other two on the whole put this or that saying along with a particular event in the narrative. The unity given by St. Matthew to these sayings grouped in a single discourse has from time to time led men to regard the Sermon on the Mount as something apart which could be abstracted from the rest of the Gospel and considered in itself, with

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the further implication that the moral teaching of Jesus contained in it could be considered in separation from his life and death and from his message about God. It is suggested that here alone is the true contribution of Jesus to the life of the world, unspoilt by the unfortunate theological and mythical accretions which mar the rest of the Gospels and are seen at their worst in the Pauline Epistles. That is the one extreme. At the opposite pole are those who regard Christianity so exclusively as a Gospel of redemption, of God's redeeming act for mankind, that they ignore the moral teaching of the Sermon on the Mount altogether.

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If the first view were right, we should not need, in considering the Sermon on the



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Mount, to interpret it by the rest of the Gospels, nor consider that any light might be thrown on it by the way in which Jesus is said to have taught and acted, still less, I think, that any help in understanding it could be gained from the Epistles of St. Paul. If the second view were right, we should not need seriously to consider the Sermon on the Mount at all. The Gospel then is a promise of power which will enable us to do what, apart from the special teaching in the Gospels, we think to be right, a Gospel which will give us power, but not illumine our mind. Both these views seem to me clearly wrong, but I do not think it possible to see why they are wrong unless we consider the new principle of action which is implied in all the moral teaching

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of Jesus, and make up our minds whether or not to accept it. It seems clear to me, not only from the Sermon on the Mount, but from what Jesus says elsewhere in the Gospels and from the teachings of St. Paul, that Jesus did not lay down new rules of right and wrong, but a new principle of action. It is true and important that the new principle implies new rules, but the rules cannot be understood except in the light of the principle. It seems also clear from the Sermon on the Mount itself that this principle is vitally connected with what Jesus has to say about the nature of God and about what God does for man. For that reason we cannot consider the Sermon on the Mount as moral teaching which has no vital connection with the Gospel of the

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grace of God; nor, on the other hand, can we understand the Gospel of the grace of God unless we see that it involves a new principle of moral action, and consequently new rules of right and wrong. But if it is true that the Sermon on the Mount implies a new principle of action, how is it that treatises on moral theory seldom say anything about it? There is, of course, an historical reason for this. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was accommodated with Greek ethical theory by the help of the distinction between nature and grace. Moral theory confined itself to natural ethics, and took Greek ethics as its starting-point, while the Sermon on the Mount was considered to deal with something other and supplementary to this, the ethics of grace. There is

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something in this distinction. For the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount takes for granted the morals with which ordinary moral theory deals—accepted rules of right and wrong and mutual obligation. But modern moral theory, having tacitly dropped the distinction between nature and grace, ignores the distinctive teaching of the Sermon on the Mount and finds no room for grace in its account of conduct. If the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is as important and as revolutionary as it is ordinarily supposed to be, this is surely extraordinary. These addresses were written in the belief that we cannot afford to let the matter stand like that. I begin by discussing the nature of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount in the hope of making

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clear the principle of action involved in it, and only after that is done consider the exemplification of that principle in some of the passages over the practical bearing of which there is most dispute.

I have examined the nature of this teaching in three of its aspects : (Jesus' demand for perfection, his teaching about desire, and his basing of moral conduct on reverence.)

The first aspect is expressed most decisively in those verses at the end of the fifth chapter which are summed up in the forty-eighth verse : " Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect," and is the subject of the first of these addresses.

As an expression of the second aspect, with which the second address deals, I

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have chosen the words in the twentieth verse of the sixth chapter: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"; and as an expression of the third, with which the third address deals, I have taken the first portion of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name."

Then in the fourth address I discuss the much-disputed verses about non-resistance to evil, the thirty-eighth to the forty-second of the fifth chapter; and in the fifth and sixth the verses about the relations of men and women and about divorce, the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth, and the thirty-first and thirty-second of the same chapter.

# I

## THE GOSPEL OF PERFECTION

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them which curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, for he maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. MATTHEW V. 43-48.*

THE MORAL TEACHING OF JESUS is so far above our ordinary conduct that we tend not to take it quite seriously, to regard it as a rather remote ideal which should have some effect on our conduct

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but not very much, just because we think that what it actually prescribes is impossible.

It is very hard at first sight to see what relation it has to the various moral codes which do in fact largely rule our lives—our station and its duties: the way a gentleman ought to behave; what any decent man may reasonably be expected to do. If we look back, we can see that the teachings of Jesus have certainly affected these codes, and we may no doubt feel that they might be affected a little more and still be reasonably practical. But if we take the Sermon on the Mount and think of that as a code which is to govern our lives as, say, “our station and its duties” now does, we don’t really think it reasonably practical. There are bits of the teaching which seem not so very



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difficult. A great part of the Christian Church has made the thirty-first verse of this chapter, about divorce, a part of a code of morals. But they have not dared to do the same with the twenty-eighth verse: "But I say unto you, whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." So others have concentrated, with a view to practical conduct, on the texts about not resisting evil. But it seems clear that if you take all these texts literally—if a man sues you, give him more; if a man takes from you, let him take still more—most of us are not only not prepared to act like that, but quite honestly don't think we ought to act like that.

We can, of course, try to get round all

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this by saying that we can all recognise how wonderful a world it would be if all people did act like that : when the Kingdom of Heaven does come, by some mysterious divine transformation, at one and the same moment, of everybody's hearts, then we should all be thankful and ready to act with others as members of the Kingdom. This teaching is on this supposition a pattern laid up in heaven, and we are to pray for its coming. In the meantime, in this present evil world, with people what they are, we have to work on more reasonable and sensible principles.

But that attempt to get away from the austerity of these demands is forestalled in such a verse as " If you love them which love you, what reward have you ? " This

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teaching of Jesus quite clearly contemplates just exactly this wicked world in which we live, where there are persecutors and extortioners and swindlers and all the rest.

But if all this is so, was not Jesus set on some quixotic adventure in an evil world, and is not that really a condemnation of this Christian teaching? Are there not very grave moral disadvantages in professing to reverence a moral command which you are incapable of making effective; which, indeed, you have really no hope of being able to obey? Is not the only result of professing to be Christian, at that rate, that we cheat? As, for example, when men make an absolutely strict rule against divorce, and then get round it by ingeniously arguing that the couple to whom they wish

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to allow divorce have never been really married. There is no end to the hypocrisy in which we may indulge when we profess a code which we don't really *want* to live up to. Yet of all sins hypocrisy is perhaps most severely condemned in the Sermon on the Mount. It is dreadful if such acknowledgment of this teaching as we do make should produce what it sternly condemns. Yet that is what comes from adopting what we judge to be an impracticable moral code. (A German book on England says that the English have only one moral ideal, *der Gentleman ideal*, whereas the Germans have many, and most superior ones. But the English, the book says, *act* on *der Gentleman ideal* as practicable, and that's what makes them so effective. There is a sting hidden

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somewhere in that compliment, and we must not imagine that the German writer is crediting us with practising Christianity.)

To all these difficulties there is the obvious answer that the Sermon on the Mount was never intended to be a code, either legal or moral. I suppose there is almost no one who thinks that the Sermon on the Mount was meant to be a legal code. The reasons against it being such are obvious enough. The law can on the whole concern itself only with the external expression of action. Just in so far as the Sermon on the Mount goes behind this external action to the anger or evil desire in the heart, in so far it goes beyond the sphere of law. But this will not distinguish the commands of the Sermon on the Mount from our ordinary moral

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codes. For these are not strictly confined to external action. If you consider what is involved in, *e.g.*, "playing the game" or any code of good manners, it will be found to include demands for such things as reasonably good temper and a modicum of cheerfulness on occasions. The real difference between the conduct taught in the Sermon on the Mount and that taught in ordinary moral codes, is that in the former all thought of reciprocity is given up. A moral code is a set of rules meant to be recognisably *kept*, rules therefore to which the majority of people are, not unreasonably, expected to conform. As individuals we are supported and encouraged to act up to our moral code by the fact that we may, without rashness, reckon that other

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people will do the same. There is no stipulation whatever in the Sermon on the Mount that others are to act in the same way. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even publicans the same?" The great part of our everyday conduct assumes a certain standard of conduct in other people. The unjust man is he who receiving the benefits of other people's good conduct to him, does not, so to speak, pay his share to them. The just man, at least in the narrower sense of the word, keeps up this standard. But the share necessarily takes account of other sharers. The standard is what others have concurred to recognise. We all take for granted that if other people start acting quite differently we cannot be expected to go

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on acting in exactly the same way. The fact that this rule is binding on all is an inducement and encouragement to each to observe it; that is indeed one great reason why we make rules. For we know perfectly well that a few unscrupulous people can pull down a common standard of conduct; pull it down for all, because so many men will say, "I am quite prepared to make reasonable sacrifices for the common good, but not if the only result of my being unselfish is that others, less scrupulous than I am, walk off with more than they have any right to." The mutual reciprocity involved in ordinary morality is stated in an extreme form by Hobbes in a famous passage :

"He that should be modest and tractable and perform all he promises



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in such time and place where no man else should do so, should but make himself a prey to others and procure his own certain ruin contrary to the ground of all laws of nature which tend to nature's preservation : and again, he that having sufficient security that others shall observe the same laws towards him, observes them not himself, seeketh not peace but war and consequently the destruction of his nature by violence."

Now, even the observance of law and moral codes is never just the enlightened self-interest which Hobbes suggests. No decent person demands before he is honest a guarantee that everybody else will be equally honest too. He acts in the faith that

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his decent conduct will meet with the response of decent conduct in other people, and he will take an honourable pride in acting up to the code without first making certain of what other people will do. He will know that there will be some people who will try to give as little and get as much as possible, and he will say something like, "Well, of course, if you choose to play that sort of game, you can score in those sort of ways, but I don't think the game is worth it."

All that is true, and yet it remains that we do expect the code we adopt to be reasonably attainable and generally maintained. No one thinks that a good law which just cannot be enforced because no one dreams of obeying it. It is roughly the same with

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moral codes. We know that there will be some who fall right below codes we adopt, but we also assume that most decent people will on the whole live up to them. In various but quite definite ways we demand that others should do so. The moral code is not enforced in the same way as a law, but it has some sort of sanction behind it. "If you are to be a member of this society, or this club or this profession, we expect at least that you should not be a thief or a cad," for example.

Such moral codes are founded partly on a rough estimation of what most people can with a little effort do. Codes must take account of circumstances, and their standard varies according to the circumstances they have to take account of. The code of

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cleanliness in the slum or in the trenches differs from the code of cleanliness in model flats with hot water laid on. The standard a code implies is *not* absolute and varies historically. We all know that to be so, and we realise that in judging a man's character from his actions or from the code he professes, we must take into account the moral assets or deficits of his time, and even of his class or of his set. In so far as the social effect of a moral code is that it helps A to act up to a standard because he has ground to expect that B and C will do the same, a moral code must not simply be an expression of any abstract ought: it must involve calculation or estimation of what in particular conditions you can reasonably expect to happen, and no one in

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his senses would think that such a calculation could leave circumstances or the temper of the times out of account. The Highway Code is neither law nor moral code, but the pious official wish that we were ready for one or the other. If this is so, and we are to have laws and moral codes at all, it is then quite clear that they cannot be deduced from the Sermon on the Mount alone. For the proper making of moral codes, as for the proper making of laws there is required a great deal of what may be properly called science, such knowledge of the circumstances of the case and of the empirical nature of man as will enable us rightly to judge whether such and such a command or prohibition being given the sanction such codes have, will help or hinder

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men to come nearer living in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Good laws are in practice made in some such way as that, with accurate knowledge of the facts of the case and the difficulties to be overcome and a wise insight and understanding of the willingness and the readiness of the people concerned to respond to a new challenge. When pacifists, for example, urge that pacifism should be made a law, as it would in effect be if public steps were taken to make any other policy than pacifism impossible to the nation—steps such as complete one-sided disarmament and disbanding of all organised force—they sometimes argue that such conduct on the part of one country would induce other countries to behave in the same way. Such an argument is based

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on a judgement as to how people in certain circumstances would actually behave, and is therefore relevant and indeed necessary to the situation. It is a judgement of fact, and surely of temporal fact. For while it might be argued that at the present time the nations of the world are so convinced of the horror and futility of modern war, that they would eagerly welcome and respond to any such bold lead, it would be a strange reading of history which supposed that this has always been true. Many people do not believe that it is true even now. But whatever we think of such arguments, they are arguments about other people's behaviour. The Sermon on the Mount is saying something absolutely different : " If ye love them which love you, or even if ye love them

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whom you expect in consequence of your love to love you, what reward have ye ? ” It puts before us a standard which is absolute and not dependent on how people actually behave or what under present conditions most of them may reasonably be expected to do.

The fact that moral codes so vary and that the standard each code implies is relative to circumstances and historical situations should not, though it often does, make us think that there is no such thing as an absolute moral standard. That is a confusion. It is a confusion from which we might be saved if only we stopped to ask ourselves, “ Why do we call the moral code of one time better or worse than that of another ? Why, for instance, do we hold



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that as regards cleanliness the standard and code of the model flat is higher than that of the slum, or why in regard to religion and learning do we call one age corrupt and another creative?" There is quite evidently some more enduring standard according to which we value the varying standards and varying codes. We do know, if we think about it, that passing codes and standards must eventually be judged and valued according to some enduring standard; and that this is true even though in the nature of things there cannot be an absolute moral *code*, nor one level of conduct which all men at all times and in all circumstances can reasonably be expected to reach.

It must be abundantly clear to which kind

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of standard the Sermon on the Mount points us. The Sermon on the Mount is not one of the moral codes I have been describing. It does not lay down a standard up to which we ordinary people may reasonably be counted upon to live, and its standard cannot be modified to suit us and our circumstances, because the standard set up is a standard of perfection. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

If we do not love God as God is revealed to us in the life and teaching of Jesus, then we are not disciples of Christ, and the Sermon on the Mount lays no obligation upon us. For the Sermon on the Mount does not say, This is how people ought to be compelled or somehow induced to behave.

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It doesn't propose to offer any of us reasonable security that if we act in the way it prescribes we shall find plenty of other people keeping us company. It doesn't put us at all in a position where we are responsible only to other people as they are only responsible to us. It isn't based on a calculation of how people will probably behave under such and such circumstances. It puts us in direct relation to God, bids us consider, and then, for love, follow after the perfection of our Father in heaven. In so far as we accept it, it *commands* us, it is not mere advice. It is a command which follows upon dedication. Obedience is laid on those who love the truth as Jesus loved it. The Sermon on the Mount shows us a way of life we are to love for ourselves for its own sake.

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This has made some say that the Sermon on the Mount is not only not a code, but that it is a condemnation of codes and even a denial of law altogether. Jesus, someone has said, was a moral anarchist. But that will not fit with what He says. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets : I am come not to destroy but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall not pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." It is because love is the fulfilling of the law, that when there is perfect love there is no need for the assertion and enforcement of law; and when, as in this world, there is imperfect love, love both inspires and gradually raises law, yet at the same time needs law for its support.

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It is by individuals being better than the social standard around them, acting without its protection and assurance, doing without the support of their fellows because of their trust in God, that general standards get raised. For in time others take heart and imitate the few till there is social support for a way of behaving which when first embarked upon seemed a forlorn hope. From that new code succeeding pioneers can make new advances. Moral and social progress depends on there being a continual succession of men and women prepared to accept the challenge of Jesus' teaching, do more than can reasonably be expected of them, and be better than laws or moral codes demand.

What the Sermon on the Mount teaches

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is not a new law, but a new spirit of life. It begins with beatitudes on those who do not possess or do not use the protection of society, who are driven or who turn to God—the poor, the bereaved, the meek, the merciful, those who get nothing and yet know how to give; and the way of life is to be like that, giving with no calculation in it of getting. The ordinary arrangements of the world, and therefore its laws and codes, are all about mutual giving and getting: and a great deal in them can be explained on the theory that getting is the main point of them. Because that is so, we tend to honour those who get most out of this mutual arrangement, the great and rich and powerful. “Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them

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and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you : but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister ; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant : even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.” So Jesus said to his disciples later ; and here he says, “ I am not with you to teach you to follow the mixed way of love and calculation, loving those who love us. I am sent to call you as children of our Father which is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.”

Such is the invitation which the Sermon on the Mount offers to us. It cannot be under-

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stood apart from a vision of God and of the Kingdom of God and the love of righteousness. If we have heard at all the real message of the Gospel, we shall begin by being excited about the kind of life which might be if our practice were in the spirit which Jesus describes and we did all that we could to create such a spirit—giving, not demanding; creating, and not hindering. It is being excited by a vision or a revelation which raises us above ourselves. Our imperfections will always be too much for us if we only take ourselves and other people as *we* find them and assume that is all there is to be done. But then that is not all, as we know perfectly well if ever we have loved anyone or anything enough to offer ourselves freely in service.



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This invitation to step outside the world of claims and counterclaims is made to us all. It is not made to a special class of people called saints or the elect. Are we, then, all asked to be better than the average? And, if so, is not that a very odd and even ridiculous demand? If it were a *demand* it would be ridiculous, but if it is an offer, and if we think that Jesus spoke the truth, it is not in any sense odd or ridiculous. Jesus was offering his disciples citizenship of a spiritual kingdom. He did not condemn earthly citizenships nor their privileges and duties, but he did not concern himself to uphold or to expound these. He made no pretence that attention to his gospel would be the means of bringing his disciples the rewards or of saving them from the duties

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of human citizenships. But he had an absolute conviction that God is continually renewing to men his gifts of life and light in their purity, and that if men love and use these gifts, as they come from God, they have their reward, for they are workers with God, and can be glad in the work of creation.

What matters in our acceptance of the invitation of the Sermon on the Mount is the spirit in which we are prepared to act and the standard of perfection which is held up to us in the love of God. A very good illustration of the effect produced when a man does, in this ordinary world, act in such a spirit, occurs in Wells's *Autobiography* where he describes how he who had been brought up in an atmosphere where getting on and making money were assumed

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to be man's main concern, met Graham Wallas, and so for the first time came to know someone who took for granted the opposite way of life—one whose only concern was how he could help people and find out the truth.

Does the Sermon on the Mount thus understood hold up an impossible ideal?

In one sense of the word "impossible," the answer is, of course, Yes. "I count not myself to have apprehended," said St. Paul at the end of his life. It is the mark of the Christian saint that, however far he is above us ordinary people in the beauty and perfection of his life, yet because he has also gone as far beyond us in his understanding of what the love of God can mean, he is continually conscious of how far he comes short of what he wants to be.

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No one can suppose that the Sermon on the Mount invites us to ease, or that we can enter the Kingdom without in one sense losing our life—rising above ourselves. We are asked to be better than our own selfish desires, our ambition, our own self-importance, our cowardice, our laziness, and we shall continually, in spite of our best efforts, find this self of ours catching us out. If ever we stop being dissatisfied, it can only be because we have become insensitive.

But all this is not to say that the ideal of the Sermon on the Mount has not been and will not be a leaven and a ferment; that it did not once and will not again turn the world upside down; that when men set themselves to follow it, it makes no practical difference to this very world we live in.

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We all know men and women who live in the spirit of this teaching : who are steadily concerned with what they can give, not what they are going to get : who seem to touch the ordinary tangles and difficulties of life with a new creative spirit. Some of them seem to us to have attained and to be saints : others not to have got anything like so far ; but they agree in their unconcern with claims and counterclaims in the direction and standard of their lives. “ Be ye perfect.” We know that such are the salt of the earth, the light of the world : the leaven that can leaven the whole lump. It is only they who make the world a decently possible place to live in.

“ The unreasonable demands of Christ.” That is not a reproach, but an acknowledg-

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ment of what the Gospel asks of us. If we ask to understand the relation of the Sermon on the Mount to life, and why it is that those who try to carry out its unreasonable demands are given grace, we must listen to what Jesus himself said: "If any man wills to do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God or whether I speak of myself."

It has been the faith of Christians at all times that if they, however stumblingly, aim at carrying out this teaching of Jesus, then their faces will be set towards where the real forward fight is going on and that, whatever surprising things they may have to learn and whatever failures they may have to acknowledge, they will have God with them in the midst of the battle to direct and restore.

## II

### TREASURE IN HEAVEN

*Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.*

MATTHEW vi. 20.

ONE OF THE MOST CURIOUS things about the teaching of Jesus as it is contained in the Sermon on the Mount is that it puts forward a standard of conduct far above men's ordinary standards, and that yet there are bits of it—as, for example, this verse—where Jesus seems to talk of the rewards of virtue in a way which sometimes offends and scandalises our more austere moralists. “Don't try to make money. It doesn't last. Save up for heaven. That does.” Isn't that what he is saying? And isn't

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it slightly shocking ? “ Don’t fast in public, but in secret. Your Father will know it and reward it openly.” Doesn’t that ask men to fast because they will be paid for it ? And indeed we know that religion can take on the guise of a higher prudence : “ Be content with your lots here, for you will have crowns hereafter ” ; “ Whatever, Lord, we lend to Thee, repaid a thousand-fold will be.” “ ‘ He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and will be repaid,’ said Mrs. Fairchild, at the same time slipping a shilling into the poor woman’s hand.” It does pull one up to find something so ugly in the cloak of religion, and it would pull one up with a vengeance if one had to think that such an attitude finds any support whatever in the Sermon on the Mount.



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I cherish the memory of a Scotch theological professor who gave back an essay he had asked his men to write on Christ's teaching on reward, with the words, "Most gentlemen who did this essay came to the conclusion that their conception of reward was considerably higher than Christ's. This is not a conclusion to be *over-emphasised*." One thing is, I think, quite certain : that this ugly prudential teaching has no warrant in the words of Jesus. "He freely forgave them both." One of the greatest conceptions which came into men's moral ideas from Jesus was that of grace : free giving—outpouring generous goodness without thought of return. St. Paul's moral teaching is transfused with the thought of the redeeming love of God, which goes out to men, and

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Jesus taught that we are to imitate our Father in that regard. Christian ethics—the whole teaching of the Sermon on the Mount—is a call to us to get beyond the world of claims and counterclaims : thoughts of “What am I to get out of this ? What claim can this man make on me ?” There doesn’t seem to me any manner of doubt that the lesson which shines out of the teaching of Jesus is, “Freely have ye received, freely give.”

I read the other day a book by a Swedish scholar on the difference between *ἔρως* and *ἀγάπη*, *ἔρως* being the Greek and *ἀγάπη* the New Testament word for love, and his thesis was that Greek teaching starts with *ἔρως*, with a desire to have, though it insists that you should desire something

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which, as Plato would say, shall really satisfy the real part of your soul ; *ἀγάπη* is the redeeming love of God, its starting-point is God, from there it goes out and gives.

I think the contrast is roughly true : that there is in most Greek teaching some trace of a mixture of virtue and prudence, and that it took the example and teaching of Jesus to release this quite different notion of going-out redeeming goodness.

But if that is so, what about these passages from the Sermon on the Mount ? For, after all, there they are. No doubt part of the explanation is that Jesus, like all great teachers, talked to men in language they could understand and started with men as he found them. Talking to men who are

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concerned all the time with what they can get out of what they do, he asks them to think whether what they are getting is really worth while—to reflect a little more about life and their demands on it. But to ask that is very different from what is ordinarily called prudential or calculating advice. To ask us deeply and seriously to reconsider our desires and re-estimate our hopes and ambitions is a most revolutionary demand. Moralists sometimes talk as though reflection could have no effect on desire, as though we were at any moment a bundle or collection of fixed desires over which we had no control ; as though all we could do was to resist the desires in the name of obligation, or else calculate how they could most easily be realised. That is a strange view

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of morality. For though planning how to get what you want need not in itself be either moral or immoral, yet it is immoral to think that the aim of life is to be as clever as you can be in satisfying the desires you happen to have. It is an immorality of prostitution ; for it means that we are using minds capable of discriminating between existing and creating new values merely to spread static selves. We must (because we can) judge the quality and worth of the desires we wish to satisfy. Advancing ingenuity of means applied to static desires makes a terrible world. To use heaven rather than earth, religion rather than business, as means to satisfy unredeemed desires, is not being heavenly or religious, but the reverse. People do sometimes think

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of religion like that, and when they do, we rightly condemn their thinking. Why Mrs. Fairchild's remark is disgusting is that she was a stupid woman of no imagination who really did regard "the Lord" as a company paying an exceptionally high dividend: that her religion didn't affect what she anyway, apart from religion, wanted out of life. To regard religion as a means of enjoying unchanged desires is to use spirit and mind to exploit, not to explore. To use spiritual means to attain material ends is prostitution, and of course we are all capable of such misuse from time to time. You remember how the two disciples succumbed to this temptation, and asked that their rather natural but slightly mean desire to be put in front of their fellows should be

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realised in heaven by their being set at the right and left hand of Jesus, and you remember how Jesus answered it—by promising them their share of suffering and denying that its reward could ever be this individual promotion and glory. It is not at all uncommon for quite well-intentioned people to describe Christianity as “a power-house,” and advocate it for the mere energy and power it gives, and it is assumed that that is a sufficient recommendation : that if a man has, through religion, got power in his life, there is no need for him or anyone else to ask how well the power is being used. That way of treating religion is just horrible. When we see it open and unashamed, as we can in our world to-day, we know that it is. But we do not, perhaps, realise how strong

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and subtle the temptation is in the best of us to do something of the sort, to try to make religion serve rather than redeem us. What is wrong is trying to make God serve Mammon. The hypocrites whom Jesus denounced were doing this. The reality of them remained the greedy, selfish, grasping person, and all the paraphernalia of religion was only used to satisfy and keep safe this greedy self. The hypocrites of literature are like that, as for instance Bulstrode in *Middlemarch*. As Plato says in the *Republic*, such men make the man within them serve the animal. Now, animals themselves are lovable creatures, but man serving the animal in him with his humanity is a horrible thing.

Consider what is men's reaction from the



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hateful result, when what should be spiritual life is only a luxurious animal life. It drives some of us to think that anything is better than hypocrisy, and that men would therefore be better without religion at all, and that the best advice is that we should become as much like animals as possible. The austere moralist reacts in another way and says: "All this comes from thinking that morality has anything whatever to do with desire except to resist it or to ignore it; satisfaction of desire is irrelevant to what you ought to do, and therefore to talk of reward at all in moral teaching is wrong."

But as regards the first-named reaction we can't go on turning our backs on religion, because it is dangerous; and as regards the second the whole assumption of such a

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moralist is that desire can't be changed or redeemed, only realised or thwarted, and what nonsense such an assumption is ! Isn't it one of our most ordinary experiences that, as we say, we don't know what we really want ? Aren't we grateful to people who teach us to take delight in things we never before thought of wanting ? Consider that curious verse I have already quoted : " For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye ? " What does reward mean there ? Isn't it like saying, " What is the fun of stopping short at loving people that love you ? Can't you see it's more exciting than that ? " In the parallel passage in St. Luke, instead of " what reward have ye ? " we find, " what *thank* have ye ? " The word is χάρις. As Canon Crum

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has pointed out, here we have the new word “ grace ” for the new thing the teaching of Jesus had brought. “ Why should we take delight in poetry ? ” says Mr. Garrod in his recent little book ; and his answer is, “ Because prose is so dull.” That seems to me proper moral teaching. Don’t we all owe an immense deal to people who have taught us new ways of life and taught us to delight in new ways of life ? As an artist can’t teach us to paint unless he has first taught us to see, as in all art our power of seeing and hearing and feeling has to grow along with our power of expressing in paint or music or words what we see or hear or feel, so in life. We have to learn to care for the right kind of things. As it is disastrous when the technique of the artist

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outruns his power of seeing, so it is in life when our power of realising our desires outruns our growth in desiring: when we are men in technique and infants in apprehension. Most of what is evil in our present civilisation is a horrible example of that.

When Jesus said, therefore, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven," he didn't mean, Take steps to get in heaven the things you treasure on earth, but, Learn to treasure, to love and delight in the things of heaven. Hunger and thirst after righteousness. Your reward will be getting righteousness. Righteousness is a reward only to those who thirst after it. If you really thirst after righteousness you will not be expecting something else as a reward. There is a passage in one

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of F. W. Robertson's sermons which expresses Christ's teaching on reward as well as it could be expressed :—

“Do right, and God's recompense to you will be the power of doing more right. Give, and God's reward to you will be the spirit of giving more : a blessed spirit, for it is the spirit of God Himself, whose life is the blessedness of giving. Love, and God will pay you with the capacity of more love ; for Love is Heaven—love is God within you.”

It is, then, no contradiction that the teaching of Jesus which says, “Give with no thought of getting,” should also say something about getting. “Seek ye *first*

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the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." There is none either between the austerity of Jesus and such words as "Seek and ye shall find, ask and it shall be given unto you." For the fundamental thing that is asked of us in seeking the Kingdom of God is that we should have no reserves and no conditions, that we should be prepared that the whole of us should be made over and redeemed. The process of learning to take delight in new things may be as full of tension and struggle and pain as is the process of resisting desires in the name of duty. What matters, then, is not whether you start with Plato by asking how you are to get what you want out of life, or with Kant by saying that your wants are irrelevant and that what should direct is

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duty. What matters is that you make no reservations about the changes in yourself which a sincere commitment will certainly bring about, and realise that on any road you take from inner desire you will not get what you want without becoming a different person in the process.

“ Whatever you seek, you shall find.  
If you ask for the wind, then the wind  
Will blow all your dreams away  
And leave you breathless and grey :

“ If you ask for the night, then the night  
Will swathe and swaddle your sight :  
Whatever in heaven or earth  
You wish, you can bring to birth.

“ Then whatever you wish for, beware !  
For every wish is a prayer,  
And every granted desire  
Burns into the soul like fire.” \*

\* Francis Couetts, *Egypt and Other Poems*.

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We make the world we live in by what we really desire and work for—and it is the world in which not only we but other people have to live. No one can look at the world now without feeling how much madness there is in it—masses of us spending our time in things that we don't really want, masses of us having no real desires that are convictions, only restless fancies and uneasiness and fear. I am quite certain that no measures are going to cure our present discontent and oppressions unless we are really prepared to ask ourselves what we want and why, and whether it is worth while ; prepared to let ourselves then go through the process of being remade in our wants and in our desires : for the teaching



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we need more than anything else, more than skilful diplomacy or technical efficiency, is the teaching of these verses :

“ Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

### III

#### WORSHIP AND REVERENCE

*Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.* MATTHEW vi. 9.

THERE CAN HARDLY BE WORDS in the New Testament more familiar to us, but how often do we consider the meaning of the first petition in the Lord's Prayer? Why, before we pray for the coming of God's Kingdom or the doing of His will on earth as it is done in heaven, still more before we pray for anything for ourselves, are we to pray that God's name be hallowed or sanctified? Isn't it that already? And, anyhow, what exactly does it mean?

The answer to that question is, up to a

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point, easy. Prayer, according to the teaching of Jesus, is nothing if not an expression of what we want or desire. Think of those curious parables about prayer—the parable of the importunate widow and the unjust judge, and the parable of the man who made his unwilling neighbour get up to let him in. They all teach that our petitions are to be the expression of what we insistently want. The putting of this petition first implies that all our desires and askings for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God, for the doing of God's will, for our daily bread, for forgiveness, for deliverance from temptation, must follow from our desire that God's name be hallowed, and therefore must be prefaced by our hallowing and our reverence and devotion. Not even the most praise-

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worthy desires are any good unless they start with our worshipping and adoring God. People express this sometimes by saying : Religion is primarily worship and adoration. It can be many things secondarily, but unless it is primarily the worship and adoration of God, it is not religion. That is one fundamental difference between religion and morality. Religion is not just doing the will of God. If it were, what would be the sense of starting with this petition, not only a distinct petition but coming first, before we pray that God's Kingdom come and his will be done ?

Before the *infinity* of God we must not only stand in awe : we must worship. We cannot disregard it. We may approach the same truth by very different ways. Some

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of you might do well to exercise your minds on Mr. C. G. Stone's *Social Contract of the Universe* with its account of true infinity. The necessity of awe has been expressed in an extreme form by the distinguished German scholar Otto : in reaction from those views of religion which stress its practical and moral character, he has described the central element in religion as numinous : something which involves awe and mystery and fear : something to which the term " rational " will not apply, though to some it may appear supra-rational, to others irrational.

There certainly is that element in religion. The Old Testament is full of it, especially the Psalms, men abasing themselves before the wonder and glory of God. " When I look

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up into the heavens, the work of thy fingers, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him ? ”

“ The world is charged with the grandeur of God.”

“ Man’s chief end,” says the Shorter Catechism, “ is to glorify God.”

There is no denying it. When you get great religion, the religion which makes the world a different place and makes men do miracles, you find men deeply aware of their own littleness and impotence and proclaiming the majesty and sovereignty of God.

God mastering me ;

Giver of breath and bread ;

World’s strand, sway of the sea ;

Lord of living and dead ;

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened  
me flesh,

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And after at times almost unmade me with dread,  
Thy doing;

*There* is the answer, up to a point, to our question as to why this prayer begins as it does. If you are going to be religious, that is what religion involves—not believing just that there is a God, but worshipping God; and with awe. Religion is worship. Prayer, a vital element in religion, though it involves asking, begins with worship.

Yes, but suppose we look at it from a little farther away or with a more entirely detached attitude, and ask: But what, then, if that is “religion,” is the point of it? Why are action, goodness, duty, not enough to occupy *us*? Why trammel our life with this irrational element, when our great need is to learn sense and reason, and organise

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our life with knowledge and more and more knowledge? Just in so far as religion is more than trying to make the best of life with the best and most accurate knowledge we have got, is it not bad? That is the fundamental quarrel of the modern scientific world with religion. It is a desperately difficult business to get men to be rational and pay enough attention to scientific method and principles. The scientific mind knows that it just must not abandon itself in the way religion demands: it must be cautious and sceptical, and not go beyond its evidence. With that modern irreligious spirit we are all nowadays deeply infected. Read any great outpouring of the religious spirit, in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, or St. Anselm's *Preface to the Proslogion*, or Luther's



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wrestlings with God, or the Parliamentary Army in their two days of prayer at Windsor, and, if you are honest, don't you feel that there is a vital outpouring of man's spirit, which we know is real but from which nevertheless we feel ourselves far, far removed ?

Some people take their stand on saying that worship is so natural to man that if you expel it, it comes back in a worse form. If men cease to worship God, they will worship the works of their own hands, the State, or the nation, or even one of themselves. That is true enough. But is it a satisfactory reason for worship ? May it not still be our duty to do the best we can to resist this irrational instinct and to try even harder than before to be as sceptical and rational as we can ? What does worship add to life ? Why

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should it be the beginning of all our actions ?

We need not confuse the issue by assuming that worship or religion must as such be good. To think that, says Father Kelly, would be to worship worship, which is clearly silly. It would be to ignore the fact that religion, or misdirected worship, can be the cause of the most horrible evils. We are not called on in these words of the prayer just to worship in general—or to worship God thought of only as an object of worship, something numinous and awful. We are called on to worship our Father in heaven. We should do well to realise that it would be better to have no religion than to worship some of the things which men have worshipped and do worship to-day.

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We can see this clearly if we think of the part played by irreverence and reverence in life. There is a place for wholesome irreverence : for poking fun at the things we take too seriously, at the shams we tolerate and submit to, at the pomposities we take so solemnly. We do not need to be reminded nowadays how easily men set up false gods and with what seriousness they worship them. The spirit of irreverence, a spirit of dry and even cynical humour, is a most wholesome corrective to that sham seriousness to which human nature is so much inclined.

But while that is true enough, no one is more pitiable than the man who has reverence for nothing, who thinks everything mean or cheap, who can't lose himself in

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admiration for something greater than himself. We can see the truth of that, without thinking of religion at all, in the ordinary sense of the word. We all know people who have found everyone out, who are so clever and old and disillusioned that there is nothing they reverence or whole-heartedly admire and believe in; and we know what unhappy and ineffective people they usually are. The true power of reverence can be seen in the simplest human relationships. You simply can't have proper human relation unless you respect and reverence the personalities of others.

What does that mean, and how does reverence differ, say, from affection? I think in this: that reverence in this simple form means recognising that the other person

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has a personality of his own, which it is not for you to absorb or to use for your own purpose, something precious but not yours. We use the word in the same way when we talk of reverence or respect for the facts. It implies an unselfish, truthful attitude of mind, having a regard for something not yourself, and it is an almost universal testimony that the best work is done by men who have that natural piety and humility of mind. Not long ago I heard that fine critic Professor Tovey telling a pupil how the foundation of all real criticism was the power first to respect the otherness of other people. It is, on the other hand, the mark of the essentially irreverent nature that it takes for granted that everyone thinks and acts only for himself, and is incapable of

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real heroism and devotion, and does not really understand anyone.

One further point about reverence in the simple sense. As it is incompatible with just absorbing or using another personality, so is it incompatible with absorbing other people intellectually, making claim to understand them through and through. What we reverence is not unintelligible, but in the strict sense of the word it is incomprehensible. We can, in von Hugel's words, apprehend but not comprehend it. I think this is clearly true of reverence for personality. The more we know people, the better we understand them: can, up to a point, anticipate what they will do, and so on; but to treat people as persons is to think of them as other than types or instances or the kind

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of person who would do this or that. It is to recognise that, when you have done all that, there is something left over, which escapes you. You remember the Francis Thompson poem about the Fallen Yew Tree :

“ they, within its very heart so crept,  
reached not the heart that courage kept.  
The hold that falls not when the town is got,  
the heart’s secret, whose immured plot  
hath keys yourself keep not !  
Its keys are at the cincture hung of God ;  
its gates are trepidant to His nod ;  
by Him its floors are trod.”

Reverence for personality involves the recognition that there is something infinite in personality. There is something of the same involved in reverence for the facts. That means that we treat the facts as part of an infinite whole which always stretches beyond what we can know or comprehend.

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It doesn't in the least mean that we think them unintelligible—only that we think them to belong to the infinite, and therefore to be never wholly in our grasp. It follows from this that there can be no reverence without faith and trust, and there cannot be trust without something of the nature of love or admiration. When we are really up against the unknown, we must either have faith or fear.

Now, when we have so considered reverence, we can look again at this supposed attack on religion in the name of science with which I started. For reverence is not irrational or incompatible with reason. On the contrary, all great science and achievement have involved it. It *is* incompatible with the belief in a world or in persons which



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rational faith ; or holds out hopes that if we continue to believe that all things, including human personalities, are completely comprehensible and therefore controllable, we shall eventually get control of them. If such promises were true, they would end in *This Brave New World* of Aldous Huxley's ; and it shows to what depths this spirit of irreverence has reduced us, that there are, I have discovered, quite a lot of people who think of Huxley's *Brave New World* as a desirable ideal which, taking heart, we should hasten to realise. There are even idiots who think that Aldous Huxley himself meant us to think this about it.

But these promises are not true, and because we have put our trust in a faithless

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reason, when that breaks down, all we can have recourse to is an irrational faith.

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do. I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years : take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall these things be which thou hast provided ?

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“ So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

How like the confident complacency of much in our civilisation is that rich man's attitude, and how like too the sudden realisation that something has been left out which will shatter it !

But to all this someone may say, Of course we should admit that if we could believe in a heavenly father, that would be better than our complacent rationalism which is already shaken out of its complacency or than the irrational faiths to which men take in despair. But how can we believe in something so simple and beautiful, considering what we now know about the world, and what we see going on in it ?

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Well, we make a great mistake if we suppose that in earlier times it was *easier* to believe in the fatherhood of God than it is now. Early religions are apt to be pretty grim, and men were fully as much inclined then as they are now to think the Gospel too good to be true. Because we say it is too good to be true, we still say, when someone uses the power of the Gospel, "He casts out devils by Beelzebub." Of course there have been times when faith in God was easier than it is now, because there have been times when the first great ventures of faith have been worked up into a systematic background which people could take for granted. But it was not essentially easier for men in the first century to believe in our Father which is in heaven than it is

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now. Then, as now, it was easier to believe in the sort of things we easily believe in, though we call them economic forces and they called them something different. There is nothing in the teaching of Jesus about God which isn't as applicable now as it was then. The sign Jesus gave to John the Baptist was that the good news was preached to the poor, not to people who were having a comfortable time and might be expected to take a rather roseate view of the world. No, it was never easy : not when Jesus taught, nor when Wesley preached the length and breadth of England. Not easy, but real to those who when they heard it have received and have acted on the word ; willed to do the will of God.

If you read the Gospels, you seem to

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find that Jesus' teaching begins with reverence for the simple relations and facts of life. That is the secret implied in "Our Father which is in heaven, hallowed be thy name." If you take the Fatherhood of God as a dogma and nothing else, it will land you in the most fantastic mythology or mushy pantheism. But if you start by responding to any real call for reverence which comes to you in fundamental human relationships—fatherhood, motherhood, friendship, trust, or in the simple feelings which the love of natural beauty arouses—why, if you answer that call, then you will see that there is in such realities an unexplored infinity. There, within our reach, is a power which there is not in the imposing systems of wealth and knowledge and cleverness. If we respond

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to the love and friendship sent us by God, we can see man as God has it in mind for man to be. By the light of that reverence we see God and we worship.

On that kind of response to life the Gospel stands. Which do you think most real and fundamental, the trust and affection which one ordinary human being has in another, or the economic system—or indeed the whole astronomical system—with these simple moral facts left out? You remember the famous saying of Kant's: "Two things fill the mind with awe: the starry heavens above and the moral law within." Both filled him with awe. But sometimes to-day it looks as though the starry heavens were in themselves Godless. It looks as though you had to choose:

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Believe in the starry heavens as Science by itself conceives them to be and drop the moral law ; or believe in the moral law and drop the scientific starry heavens. If we could have made Kant choose he would not have hesitated. I don't mean that the dilemma is a real one. It is like one of those choices that are made in a fairy-tale, where the hero has to choose between two alternatives and if he choses the right one he gets both.

To get to a point where worship starts with our Father which is in heaven, is to begin with the reality of the moral law or of the infinity of these simple relationships, and have such a hold on reality there that we know that the rest of reality has got to be interpreted in the light of what we learn



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of their fundamental nature. That leads both to "Our Father which art in heaven" and to "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers."

Worship does not start from us by ourselves, but from us in our God-given setting of simple relationships through which we learn about God. If we love not our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen. But without God giving us sight we do not ever see our fellow-men in their relation to God. Only when we respond to what is shown us by God can we pass from these simple relationships to a sense of a Father in heaven.

In the mind of any seeker after God must not two thoughts be constantly present?—

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the question : “ When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained, what is man ? ” The answer : “ Our Father which art in heaven.”

## IV

### THE GOSPEL OF NON-RESISTANCE

*Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil : but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile with him, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

MATTHEW V. 38-42.

I TRIED IN THE FIRST of these addresses to explain what seems to me to be the relation of the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount to law. I pointed out that this teaching was not meant to be a new law or code. Human laws or codes are based upon

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calculations of how most people may reasonably be expected to behave. It is assumed that with a reasonable amount of effort such rules will get themselves kept. A law that is not going to be kept, which asks of people more than they are most of them at all intending to give, is a bad law. It would be of no use making a law or moral code in order to put pressure on men and women to be saints. That the Sermon on the Mount does ask us to be just exactly this, in itself shows that it cannot both be regarded seriously and yet treated as legislation. For Jesus told men not as a command, but as a revelation and a hope that men are to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. We saw that the way of life Jesus revealed as an offer and a hope raised

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men up above the varying standards of laws and moral codes, which depend so largely on the fashion of the time and upon changing circumstances. Jesus bids us look at an absolute standard, in order to give us a new sense of direction in our lives. A new conviction as to God and as to the divine destiny of man gives us power to disregard the world of claims and counterclaims and to try to give asking nothing again but that we shall be kept in the true line of life.

I want now to apply such general considerations to these most disputed verses in the fifth chapter, which are all concerned with the general command not to resist evil. They are perhaps the most difficult verses in the Sermon on the Mount. But the centre of difficulty is not to be found in the actual

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difficulty of the task they set, though what they teach is difficult in that sense. The centre of difficulty for most people who try to think it out, is the difficulty of believing that if we had the strength and faithfulness to put these precepts into practice, it would really be for the good of society.

Contrast these precepts—"turn the other cheek," "give thy cloke also," "go with him twain"—with those that follow: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them which curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you." Nobody thinks these latter precepts *easy* to carry out. It is very hard indeed not to let hate produce

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hate, not to let oppression produce revenge.

“How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee Until seven times, but until seventy times seven.”

There are to be no limits or bounds to our goodness and to our goodwill to men. It is hard and austere enough to be told not :

“You are to be pretty good, or as good as other people and perhaps a little better,” or

“to come up to the standard set by the fashion of your times,” but plainly “You are

to be perfect.” But here, whilst we doubt

our ability to carry out the precepts, we

do not doubt that the world would be a

fairer and more wholesome place if more of

us did carry them out. Our difficulty about

the first verses is different—not that the

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commands are harder. If we take them quite literally, they are, indeed, a little easier. If we could stop at the actual outside action proposed, and consider that when a man had smitten us on the right cheek and we had turned the left, we were free ; that when someone had after unjust legal process got both our coat and our cloak, we could stop : if that were the end of it, we might manage it. But the acts would then become very much like the tithes of mint and cummin—things performed professionally and leaving the professional performers, and those performed upon, all unredeemed. As long as we think of the commands in this outside literal way, we may well ask, “ What would be the good of it ? ” If the mint and cummin did no good, it did not in



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itself do harm ; but if men are left unredeemed, unchanged by grace, would not these precepts only encourage greed and violence ? Does not a bully become more and more of a menace to society if no one opposes him ? Would not the body of society be endangered, and would not also the soul of the bully be in a worse danger than before ? Is it at all clear that if we did achieve love of our enemies, we should always behave as these verses suggest ?

Let us leave for the moment the thirtieth verse, which has been the subject of so much dispute and has been taken to mean that we may never use force, and consider the fortieth, forty-first, and forty-second. The fortieth says that if you are sued at law, you are to give more than is

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demanded. If that is taken as laying down a universal rule for society, it would mean that we are never to resist any claims made against us at law. That would practically mean that we are not to have laws at all : in so far as it implies that no one is to stand up for his legal rights. A great German jurist Ihering wrote a book called *The Fight for Law*, in which he expounded how much the rule of law depended on men being prepared to stand up for their rights. But can there be any doubt that we ought not always to do so ? A society in which all men always insisted on their legal rights would be a disgusting society to live in, even if we were content with much less than the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. On the other hand, do we seriously think

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that we are loving our enemies if we do not resist the claims of legal blackmailers? I don't think we can avoid the conclusion that were we to act in that way constantly we should be making laws and rules impossible : that it is for the advantage of all, even of those who from time to time break rules, that rules should be kept. I am quite clear that we believe that we ourselves should be made to keep rules, and that if we love our neighbours as ourselves, we should support the maintenance of rules. But here in the Sermon on the Mount we are called upon to fulfil, not to destroy the law, and to bring love to our interpretation and application of it. We are never to say, The law is on my side and that is an end of the matter. We are to be ready not to give up our

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public concern for law, but to modify our private resentments. We are to go a long way in not standing up for our rights at those times when without danger to society we are free to do so.

But applying a rule in love is one thing ; making a rule of making rules impossible is quite another : it is an easier thing and a disastrous one.

As I said in the first sermon, the nature of rules depends on how men normally behave ; we are here called on to be better than that, but that doesn't alter the necessity for rules. Of course in all such things the odds are enormous that we shall let needful care for order mean only that we take the rules we find and think that being inside them is enough guarantee of conduct. Yet it is

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not care for order and rules we need shaking out of, it is lazy living within fossilised forms. We need a dramatic striking expression like this Sermon on the Mount to pull us up out of that laziness. It says to us, Your being within your rights and the other person being wrong is by no means an end of the matter. You ought perhaps to give in and give in again, even more than he is now asking. You mustn't ever shelter yourself under the guarantee of the law or the ordinary moral code. It is up to you to make the law humane.

The forty-second verse says, "Give to him that asketh thee." Does that mean that it is unChristian to issue warnings against what is called indiscriminate charity? We know well enough in Oxford that there are

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people who prey parasitically on the kind hearts of undergraduates. Martin Luther was deceived by beggars again and again before he wrote his warning against easy giving. If we look at the facts, I don't think there is any doubt that if we bring it about that people can earn more money by wheedling than by honest work, we are putting a strong temptation in the way of some of them and we have no right to do so. Are we then to harden our hearts and do nothing? That clearly is equally wrong. The *easy* wrong things to do are to give without thought, and *not* to give, again without thought. We owe people our clear thought as well as our kind heart. We ought to give to him that asketh us, but not always what he asks; and it often takes a great

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deal more pain and trouble and thought to give people what they need than to give them what they wish. To take these verses as simple rules, requiring of us lots of *will to do*, but no *thought to interpret*, is really moral laziness, and can clearly do much harm.

The forty-first verse does not usually bother us, because men don't ordinarily compel us to go miles with them: but commentators explain that the odd Greek word for "compel," ἀγγαρεύσει, refers to the system of post stations along the great roads. Their occupants held their lands from Government with the obligation to furnish horses and escort along the roads. That was their form of paying taxation. I was told once that among the Santals in India each village has a man whose business

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it is to guide travellers along the intricate paths of the district. Performing that service is how he pays his taxes, and the man who told me this described how, when the guide had brought him to the boundary, and the guide of the next village wasn't there, this guide said, "Well, I'll go on with you," and did the other man's service. That was being compelled by law to go a mile and going two. But if some watching authority had said, "The guide in the first village is a willing fellow, let's double his taxes and say he must always go through both districts: for the guide in the second village is a sulky fellow, and always makes difficulties about paying his taxes, let's tell him he needn't pay any," wouldn't that entirely alter the situation, and shouldn't



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we think the first man was right to resist if what he had done of free grace was being made a rule for him? For to make the difference between his spontaneous goodness and the other's irregular badness the basis of a rule is to make the rule unjust, and rules ought to be just and we ought to do our best to maintain justice. So that while the teaching of the forty-first verse clearly is that we should pay our taxes cheerfully and put love and willingness to take more than our share of bearing burdens even into the way we fill up our income-tax forms, it still remains our duty to see that taxation is just, and it may sometimes be our duty to stand up for our legal rights. Can we then give any clear rule once for all as to when we should stand up for our rights and when we

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should let ourselves be put upon? No, no clear rule. We have time and again to use our minds anew and to re-exercise our moral judgements. But we can with practice come to see more readily when our actions are really being determined by unChristian motives, selfishness and anger and pride and thoughts of our prestige and our importance, and be on our guard against such temptations.

The same principles apply to the thirty-ninth verse, which is often made the text for a rule of acting without force. Why we are quite rightly suspicious of it ever being our duty as Christians to use physical force, is that physical force is a natural accompaniment of anger and greed and evil passions. That is true of almost all use of

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physical force against our fellow men, and of course especially true of its greatest and most terrible example, war. Because that is so, I do not myself think we can say quite simply, as people do, If you approve of the action of the police to maintain law, you must approve of war when used for the same purpose. I don't think that applies even to the maintenance of law at home. We think there has to be a lot of justification before the troops are called out to maintain order at home. It remains true that it is our duty to maintain just rules ; but we are to use every effort and spare ourselves no pains to see that these are kept with love. The use of force against each other is always a sign of failure or misunderstandings : but when we have failed, to refuse to use force might

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be a sign of even greater failure. It can never be our duty just to say, This is a situation where nothing can be done without force, but force is wrong, therefore I must do nothing. Read, for example, the terrible story of the Bristol riots at the time of the passing of the Reform Bill, and allow as much as you like that the riots were brought about by greed and folly and incompetence and all kinds of human failure, and ask yourself whether if you had been the officer in command of the troops, you, as a Christian, might not at some stage have felt it to be a duty to fire in order to disperse the crowd. I, at any rate, cannot get behind that being perhaps the only possible right action for the particular officer who had to deal with a tragic human failure.

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Does all this mean that the appeal of extreme pacifism to the Sermon on the Mount is unjustifiable? I think the answer depends on the form that appeal takes. Nothing that I have said qualifies the command that we are to love our enemies, and we are far enough away from that in all conscience both in our individual and our international behaviour. But I have maintained that the truest way to love your enemies or, for that matter, your friends may sometimes be to resist forcibly the evil they are trying to do, as we should hope ourselves to be resisted in like case. I am sure that you cannot take the command to resist not evil literally *as a universal command* without giving up all law and justice, and few if any people, whether pacifists or not,

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are prepared to do that. Most pacifists would also, even if unwillingly, admit that if justice with force behind it is imperfect, yet war is an infinitely worse way of settling disputes. There are the strongest reasons for taking all possible steps to bring our international relations up even to the level of our imperfect relations to our fellow-citizens, but that is not of course to give up the use of force, though it is radically to change the way force is used. But when pacifists argue, as they sometimes do, that the use of force is justified within the State because there it sustains justice, but cannot be justified in international relations, such argument is surely absurd. It really implies that you are asking men to adopt a higher standard of conduct in international than in

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civil relations. At home our justice may have the sanction of force, but abroad, though we seek justice, we are to take the higher line and renounce force altogether. For that is what extreme pacifism as a public policy involves, that pacifists ask their fellow-countrymen to renounce altogether the sanction of force in any differences which they have with the people of other nations, though they do not demand that they shall give it up in differences which they have with one another. The extreme pacifists would in effect act as if they could commit other nations to a certain course of action without there being the least expectation that these people will follow it. It is paradoxical that the very people who wish to make this demand often take the worst view

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of the actual behaviour of nations to one another, speak as though justice between nations does not exist and refuse to see any difference in degrees of injustice between one war or another or one party to a war and another. All are absolutely black. But it surely remains true that if in law or public action too much is asked of people, the result is something very different, and often tragically different, from what is intended. If it be our duty to support the rule of law at home even if that cannot be done without our being prepared to use force where necessary, it is surely our duty to do our best to bring about the rule of law abroad even if it may mean using much more force than is now necessary to bring it about at home.



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It remains our duty both at home and abroad to behave in such a way to other people as to give every chance of securing justice to those who most need it without the use of force. But at home, while we have got a long way towards such a general acceptance of law that force retires more and more into the background, we have got to that position, by pursuing the double policy of seeking to make force unnecessary but being determined in the meantime to see justice done even if force must be used for the purpose. And there is no reason to suppose that the same double policy is not as essential if we are to inspire our international relations with justice and gradually bring into being a world community which

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accepts law. I can see no escape from this position unless we regard force as a thing so intrinsically evil that we are prepared to give up any kind of law or rule altogether. And can anyone maintain that force is intrinsically evil? Surely not in this age of harnessing force to our needs? But if anyone should say, "I grant that justice is an end worth if need be fighting for, whether at home or abroad, but modern war has so poisoned all our international relations that only some striking repudiation of it can bring men to a more sober view, and for me any participation in this use of force is too high a price to pay for social security. I therefore feel called upon to pursue the exceptional conduct which the Sermon on

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the Mount clearly teaches may be demanded of us for the purposes of God, and I am prepared to abide by the consequences." In this attitude of such a conscientious objector there seems to me no inconsistency and we may clearly be called upon to act in that sort of way when confronted by evils which have got so entangled with the whole existing system that we cannot easily repudiate them without repudiating much of the system at the same time. On an issue of that sort a man must judge as he has conviction, and in following his conviction he may do noble service even to the State whose commands he is repudiating.

The trouble is that we want to have it always simply one way or another. And if

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we admit that there may be circumstances in which it is right to use physical force, we tend to say, Force is all right, and think that we can fall back on accepting the ordinary practices of average people. And if we don't accept the ordinary practices of average people, we want to be able to say that they are clearly and demonstrably wrong in general. A mother who is convinced that she ought on occasions to punish her children, may use that conviction to justify herself in indulging her temper and punishing them indiscriminately when she is cross and tired. Clever fools looking on may then say, All punishment is just the exercise of sadistic passion. But both these positions are clearly silly, and their silliness comes from

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our demand to have our *rules* absolute instead of our standard.

But if we are to have no clear-cut absolute rules, it may be finally objected, isn't life quite intolerably complicated? It might appear so, but the appearance is, I think, mistaken : mainly because love so often and so largely gives wisdom in the concrete situation with which we are confronted. Really right conduct is very largely a matter of love and imaginative sympathy. It needs thought, of course, but the first two qualities count for far more. If a man will to do the will of God, he will know of the doctrine.

What we have to face is that we can't get a guarantee that because we care for principles there is nothing more to do and

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we may be sure that all our particular actions are right and that we have, so to speak, put our moral money into Government securities. That is what people are mostly after when they want simple absolute rules. But I see no reason why we should assume that that demand of ours ought to be gratified. If our duty as Christians is to learn to die in order to live, that necessity to take risks and venture without guarantee of security applies to the use of our minds and moral judgements as well as to everything else. If we are in earnest we learn by our mistakes and then even these are not all waste.

Nor need we fear that because no tram-lines are laid down for Christian travel, the way is one of distraction and confusion,

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a kind of highbrow variety of living in the moment and from hand to mouth. Contrariwise, all is fulfilment of divine law, and no one can read the life of Jesus without a sense of Jesus' faith in the steadfastness of God, his conviction that underneath are the everlasting arms.

## V

### MEN AND WOMEN—I

*Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*

*It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

MATTHEW V. 27, 28, and 31, 32.

I PROPOSE IN THE last two of this series of addresses to consider the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount about the relations of men and women. It is a subject which just because of its extreme importance is never *easy* to discuss. To-day it has be-



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come, for many, so controversial a question that it is tempting to avoid looking at it at all on occasions or at times when controversy is out of place. But we have got to face the downright and emphatic character of these verses in the Sermon on the Mount ; and also to face the fact that in the modern world the Christian conception of marriage is being widely challenged and in practice discounted. That is why I want us to try to see if there is not something in this teaching of Jesus which goes deeper than the controversies of the moment, attention to which may help us to approach controversy with courage and sanity. This is at any rate one way in which to discover whether Christianity still is a light to lighten our darkness.

For quite another reason than avoidance of controversy the subject as it stands in these chapters is difficult. Here, if anywhere, the teaching of Jesus seems to imply a standard whose severity is increased when we remember that the Greek word translated “to lust” is only *ἐπιθυμῆσαι*, and that there is therefore no justification for making much of the distinction between “lust” and “desire.” And here, too, if anywhere in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus seems to be not only enunciating a principle but also laying down a rule or law of conduct. Certainly these thirty-first and thirty-second verses have been taken by a large portion of the Christian Church as the authority for ecclesiastical legislation about marriage. It has been asserted on the

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strength of these verses that Jesus laid down for all his followers a law, not only of monogamy, but of indissoluble monogamy.

It is important to realise that this passage in the Sermon on the Mount is to this extent exceptional, that whether or not we regard the thirty-first and thirty-second verses as being meant to prescribe a law or rule of conduct, they do certainly differ from the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth verses in describing not a spiritual state, but an institution. The twenty-eighth verse describes the sin of the heart, the fundamental evil in thought which if present must corrupt the relations of men and women. The thirty-second verse concerns behaviour in regard to marriage allowed by then existing law but on this new principle of

Jesus indefensible. We have in the twenty-eighth verse the principle and in the thirty-second an application. I am going to argue, when I come to discuss the thirty-second verse, that to make that verse the authority for ecclesiastical legislation denying divorce is to misunderstand it, that this is not a piece of legislation unique in the Gospel of Jesus. But nevertheless the passage is exceptional, and that verse 32 can be interpreted as legislation has led to much misunderstanding. The Church has said about verse 32, "Here is a definite clear command of Jesus, about outside behaviour which we can carry out; what is even more satisfactory, we can make a law of it." Concentrating on that, men have neglected verse 28. This is partly because when a state of

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mind and heart is in question the Church if it is to exercise authority must recognise and deal direct with the individual conscience ; but it is also partly because the Church did not dare face up to the saying at all. But such neglect is disastrous to an understanding of what Jesus was after. His teaching about the institution of marriage arises from His teaching about sexual desire. He says in verse 28 that a way of desiring, a particular attitude of a man towards a woman, is the real evil of adultery, as hate is the real evil of murder. We must understand the principle behind that saying if we are to go on to understand what Jesus says about the institution.

To neglect the earlier and concentrate upon the later verse has this further dis-

advantage, that it helps us to think that sexual relations hold a unique place in morals : that sexual ethics are not the outcome of a universal principle, but something special and absolute, which just is so, *i.e.* not ethics at all. We don't normally like discussing the ethics of sex, because we don't admit that there is anything to discuss about them. That has the fatal disadvantage that where an absolute ecclesiastic or social authority is not accepted, the whole moral content of Christ's teaching in the matter disappears. People regard sexual morality as a mere tabu of a superstitious society : or as depending on the economic dependence of women or on merely physiological facts. The whole thing is not felt to depend upon moral principles at all. Having given up

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authority, we fall back on private taste or social expediency or something of that sort. This seems to me not only quite hopeless, but to miss the essential nature of Jesus' teaching. Here, as always, Jesus made it his business to lay bare the essential principle in conduct, not to deliver definite authoritative codes. He spoke with authority indeed, but with a moral authority, as who should say, Don't you see *this* is what you are really doing? And you must see that that is not the way your Father in heaven would have you behave. He appeals to principles which, once they are recognised, have their own authority and their own persuasiveness. If we don't recognise a principle *of that kind* in the austere saying of verse 28, then we needn't bother about verse

32. I don't think Jesus ever said, "I know the mind of God as you don't, so you must take it from Me that this is right and that is wrong." He rather used all sorts of ways, like parables, to make men think and see for themselves what they were doing.

If, then, we mean business at all in this matter we must try to see the principles involved in verse 28, before we discuss the teaching about marriage in verse 32. I shall try to do the first now, and leave the second till later.

There is one other preliminary thing which must be said if we are to consider this teaching in its proper context. We must remember the historical conventional morality which forms a background to Jesus' teaching. His remarks are addressed to men.



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He was faced with a situation where *men* determined the relations of the sexes and women were regarded as beings whose fate was settled by what men chose to decide ; where it was taken for granted, and for reasons that were compelling, that a woman must belong to some man. You can see that assumption in the curious words of verse 32, "causeth her to commit adultery." The assumption is that if a woman was divorced, she was bound to be picked up by someone else. We sometimes don't appreciate the very great thing which came through Christianity—that a woman could be unmarried and be safe, without belonging to any man. An historian once said to me that he thought one of the greatest achieve-

ments of Christianity was the existence of the maiden lady in the ordinary world.

There is a remarkable passage in Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, where Doughty describes the Christian ideal of marriage to Bedouins whose conventional morality is substantially that which Jesus was criticising.

“ ‘ This is the law of marriage given by God in the holy religion of the Messiah, the son of Miriam by the spirit of Ullah. As God gave to Adam Eve, one woman, so is the Christian man espoused to one wife. It is a bond of religion until the dying of either of them ; it is a faithful fellowship in sickness, in health, in the felicity and in the calamity of the world,

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and whether she bare children or is barren ; and that may never be broken, saving because of adultery.' ' But,' say they, ' the woman is sooner old than her husband : if one may not go from his wife past age to wed another, your law is not just.' One said laughing, ' Khalil, we have a better religion, thy rule were too straight for us. I myself have wedded one with another wives fifteen. What say you, companions ? In the hareem are many crooked conditions. I took some, I put away some, ay Ullah ! until I found some with whom I could live.' "

Christianity has gradually done away with this attitude of men towards women, but it

dies very hard, and in Jesus' time it was taken for granted.

Let us now consider verse 28, Whosoever looketh on a woman to desire her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

It is clear that this verse is like verse 22, which explains the relation between anger and murder. There Jesus is saying that the real evil in murder is hatred, and if you hate, you are a murderer. We need not make this mean that whoever hates is as bad as a murderer, as though there were no difference of degree in hatred. For it has in ordinary circumstances to be an overpowering hatred, long indulged in, which can drive a man to murder. Jesus' teaching is that it is the hatred, not the external act to which it leads,

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which is the seed of evil. This is the fundamental difference between law and the teaching of Jesus. When evil desires pass into external actions of a certain seriousness, the law steps in—but not before. The teaching of Jesus is bent toward averting evil rather than to retribution. Take another instance; some ways of getting the better of people are prohibited by law, and others are allowed. Jesus' teaching is that greed, the desire to get more than your share, is the real evil, whether or not that happens, to issue in conduct which law condemns. Law, as we saw before, has to take people as it finds them and lay down a standard which it can reasonably hope to be able to apply and to realise concretely now. Jesus is concerned with perfection, and therefore

with pointing out the seeds of evil, whether or not the seed grows and issues in acts which exceed the bounds laid down by law. The law cannot even with spying and inquisition see into the secrets of men's hearts, though it can regulate their outward acts. Jesus called on men to look into their own hearts and to achieve the spiritual unity of sons of God.

What the law had said in this matter was in effect, "You can't expect men not to desire women, but we must set limits to their desires or their expression of them, and they must not let their desires interfere with other men's rights over their wives." Over-indulgence in desires may lead to social consequences which are obviously dangerous to the stability of society. When that

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happens the law must take action. But so far as the law is concerned, desires may be indulged in freely up to that point. Jesus is not concerned with these questions. "Who made me a judge or a divider over you?" He is concerned with the attitude of mind which is at variance with the mind of a creator—whether in any given circumstances that does or does not issue in external actions with which human law will deal. What Jesus is clearly saying in this verse is, "If your attitude, your feeling towards, your thinking about women is of a certain kind, you are an adulterer. Whether that attitude actually leads to what the law recognises as adultery is, comparatively speaking, an accident." It follows that there can be adulterous relations between men and

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women inside marriage, as Milton recognises in *Paradise Lost*. It is, I think, also true that there may be relations between men and women which the law condemns as adulterous which do not fall under the condemnation of this verse.

What, then, is this “looking on a woman to desire her” which is the essential evil in the relations of men and women? Does the verse mean that all sexual desire is evil, and that the ideal would be to get rid of it altogether: that we ought to try to attain to a state of mind above such desire? This verse has been interpreted in this way, but not by the central teaching of the Christian Church. There *is* an asceticism which thinks all desire to be evil: which holds that we ought to want to be freed from desire alto-



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gether ; and that kind of asceticism usually attacks especially sexual desire. Human terror of evil makes men want to cut out the possibility of going wrong. This is an attitude of mind which is always cropping up in human history, and it appears in Christianity. But avoidance of desire is the explicit teaching much more of Buddhism, and in the West it is more characteristic of Greek than of Christian thought. It is certainly not the doctrine of Jesus. We need not forget that this verse is followed by the tremendous warning of verse 29 : " If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." But it was just because

Jesus did not despise the body and its desires that He thought its right use of such tremendous importance.

What puzzled men about Jesus so much was that He was not an ordinary ascetic of the kind they could easily understand. "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." But, then, neither on the other hand did He take up the ordinary man's casual attitude that you must expect a certain amount of mere animality from man and there is no need to bother about it, so long as some outer limits are set to it. The austerity of Jesus comes, not from His despising the body, but because of His thinking it capable of such divine uses that its perversion to lower uses was tragic prostitution. If you underrate sex and all

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bodily desire, you easily come to think that it doesn't matter how you treat it. According to the teaching of Jesus, if you care intensely for something, you care for its possibilities, and you recognise the decisive possibilities in the ways it can be used. The love and the severity of Jesus go together. He cared because he saw more in sex, not because he saw less, than the formalist or than the easy-going man.

Well, if this verse is not a condemnation of sexual desire as such, of what is it a condemnation?

We can begin to understand if we go back to one of the preliminary remarks I made. The conventional morality of the day took for granted that men regarded women not as persons but as objects, as means to the

gratification of their desires, instruments of their convenience or pleasure, or as mothers of their children—not as having an individuality and life and value of their own.

The verse therefore means at least this. Whosoever looks on a woman as just an object of desire or use is an adulterer. The essential evil is to regard a woman as a means to the gratification of our desires—as an object, a thing, and not as a person. That is, of course, the obvious and clear evil of prostitution, that women in prostitution are treated in this way. It is clear also that that evil is not confined to prostitution or adultery. It can quite easily occur within legally respected marriage.

Christian morality has slowly and gradually changed the relations of men and

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women into relations of equality, where each is regarded as a person in his or her own right. It has done this slowly and imperfectly, so that in what is supposed to be Christian teaching there is often left much of the old pagan view of woman as something inferior to or less of an individual than man. But it is the influence of Christ's teaching which has gradually brought about this tremendous change in the relation of men and women. It is only in our own time that even the bare conception of equality has been really popularised, and that we have begun to take for granted that in sex relations women can treat as they are treated and are as much to be regarded as individuals and persons as the men. Paradoxically, the one country which has really

stamped on all its institutions this equality of men and women is Godless Russia.

But if all that this verse means is that men and women are to be equal in their relations, we might hold that this generation, in so far as it takes for granted the equality of men and women, has solved all the problems of sex and has no need to worry about the warnings of these verses. There are many nowadays who are so taken up with the great achievement of this generation and its immense superiority in this respect to earlier generations, that they take this attitude. Opinion in Soviet Russia certainly did at first, though Lenin protested against it and public opinion already shows some change.

“ Women are now our equals : they used

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to be our superiors," is a current saying we had better think about seriously. To take up the attitude of content with mere equality is entirely to misunderstand Jesus' teaching about desire. His teaching about sexual desire is part of his teaching about desire in general. The distinction between desiring something for its own sake or, in simpler language, loving it, and desiring it as a means to our own gratification may seem over-subtle for practical use, but it is a fundamental distinction. For to love things means to think them precious—a judgement as to a quality in them—and upon this judgement as to inherent quality Christianity always inexorably insists; whereas if we let ourselves use other people or things as means only, we soon become grossly in-

sensitive as to their quality. “Used and forgotten” in *love* is as cynical and subversive as Mr. Podsnap’s “asked and got rid of” in friendship.

There is an early poem of George Meredith’s which sets out with the vividness of youth the difference between loving and using :

The lover of life holds life in his hand  
Like a ring for the bride.

The lover of life is free of dread :

The lover of life holds life in his hand  
As the hills hold the day.

But lust after life waves life like a brand  
For an ensign of pride.

The lust after life is life half dead.

Yea, lust after life hugs life like a brand,  
Dreading air and the ray.

For the sake of life,  
For that life is dear,  
The lust after life  
Clings to it fast.



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For the sake of life,  
For that life is fair,  
The lover of life  
Flings it broadcast.

The lover of life knows his labour divine  
And therein is at peace ;  
The lust after life craves a touch and a sign  
That the life shall increase.  
The lust after life in the chills of its lust  
Claims a passport of death ;  
The lover of life sees the flame in our dust  
And a gift in our breath.

Desire in itself is not evil. On the contrary. Active and alive desire is the force behind the greatest things in life. Did not Jesus say we are to hunger and thirst after righteousness? But in all desiring there is the possibility of turning it round and making the purpose or the person we should serve a means, and the gratification of our desire in itself an end. Take a simple

and prosaic example. We ought to be healthy and eat and drink with an appetite and therefore with enjoyment, but seriously to be a gourmet is beastly. There ought to be enjoyment and zest in all our activities, but in them all, even in those we call the highest, this perversion is possible. Even religious ritual may gratify the senses rather than redeem them. We can make the pleasure or gratification the end, and not the accompaniment of activity. When we do that seriously, we prostitute that activity. This is only an application of the general principle that we find ourselves by losing ourselves. We express our personality in devotion to something beyond ourselves, in love, admiration, reverence and enjoyment of that other.

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Now, if this distinction between lust and love is important in all desire, it is supremely important in the relations of men and women. It makes it quite clear in the first place that equality of men and women does not in itself solve the question. For the evil of the inequality was in treating woman not as a personality, but as a means to gratification. But it is obvious that two people can each treat the other simply as means to gratification, not as persons; as a man can treat himself as merely means to the gratification of desire. But the one thing which love or friendship ought to do is to teach us to love people for themselves—not as means to our gratification or importance—not even as means to other more excellent purposes—but just for themselves.

If you are really fond of people, you are fond of them for themselves, not for their usefulness or even for their goodness, but for their funny, enchanting selves. Being in love is the chance given us to open our eyes and really see someone else and know what it is to love with no thought of self involved, and so actually to widen our own range of real experience. If we use this chance rightly, we can by being in love learn more and more of the art of forgetting ourselves and knowing persons as persons. You can't learn to treat persons as persons by thinking about it, for it is more a matter of emotion than of the intellect. We are given this chance to discover another personality, and therefore our own. And yet just because this natural relation between

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a man and a woman can do so much, its perversion is correspondingly serious. It is possible, as we all know too well, to treat a relationship which may be the road to the greatest things in life as merely a means of single or mutual gratification. When in that sense a man looks on a woman to desire her, or a woman on a man to desire him, there is prostitution and adultery.

But if this is so, are we not committed to an impossibly high standard to which we can't attain? Does it not follow that we are all guilty in regard to adultery? Yes, it does, just as it follows that we are all, in so far as we hate, guilty in regard to murder, and, in so far as we are selfish, guilty in regard to theft. Once we set before ourselves the standard of perfection, that

is the consequence. What matters, what may redeem us, as I said earlier, is the direction in which we are set.

But finally, if, as Jesus teaches, the attitude of mind in all these things is what really matters, desiring wrongly, hating, etc., where do the external actions come in? If all hatred is murder, does murder really matter more than the hating we are all guilty of? If all perversion of sexual desire is adultery, is there anything particularly wrong in adultery? Is there any relation between Jesus' teaching about the real wrongness in our emotions, and certain kinds of acts or institutions being wrong?

These verses do imply that there is such a relation between chastity as a habit of mind and the ideal of marriage as an institution.

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That is what I propose to consider in the next address. Meanwhile if we need help in realising the difference to woman which Christianity has made we might well read that remarkable passage in Seeley's *Ecce Homo* (end of Chapter IX) where he speaks of the effect produced on Jesus when they brought before Him an adulteress—an effect “such as might have been produced on many since, but perhaps on scarcely any man that ever lived before.”

## VI

### MEN AND WOMEN—II

*It hath been said—Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you—That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery : and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.*

MATTHEW V. 31, 32.

WE ARE NOW TO CONSIDER what is the relation between the institution of marriage and the teaching of the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth verses about purity of mind. As I noticed in the last address, these verses are the only instance where Jesus draws a direct connexion between any definite form of institution and that inner state of mind which is for him decisive as



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to good and evil. Many people, as I noticed, have argued that this is the one case where Jesus was not only concerned with principle, but with actual legislation, and on that argument a large portion of the Christian Church has refused to recognise the proper legality of divorce. I argued in the first address of this series that laws, unlike principles, are always temporal and historical, taking account of the standard of conduct men have actually attained and of what they are prepared to do. But here Jesus seems to describe a form of the institution which is to be always right, and must therefore apply through all changes of historical conditions. Indeed, in the version in St. Mark, Jesus specially describes the Mosaic law of marriage as formed to

suit the hardness of men's hearts, and contrasts with that his own account of the institution of marriage as it ought to be. The implication there would seem to be that, so far as men and women desire one another rightly, their relations with one another must be on this pattern, and that the inner purity of heart will imply a certain form of external legal relationship.

It may be argued, I myself think, rightly, that we are mistaken in supposing these verses to prescribe a fixed form of legislation for all Christians. It seems to me that we are bound to ask in regard to legislation : What particular laws about divorce, men and women and society being at any time what they are, will at this time help men and women most nearly to achieve the ideal

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institution of Christian marriage? We should be bound to recognise, if we examined the history of the marriage laws of different Christian countries and of Christian Churches, that other than ideal considerations have gone to their making. No one could possibly deny, I think, that the economic dependence of women on men has had a good deal to do with marriage laws. But even if we admit this, and argue that Jesus would have thought that all marriage laws should continue in some fashion or another to take into account the hardness of men's hearts, still we seem to be given in this one instance an example of ideal legislation or of an ideal institution.

This is a puzzling exception in some ways. There is always a contrast between the

inner purity of heart with which Jesus is concerned and the roughness and hardness of law. But that a thing so spontaneous and free, so dependent for its beauty on its freedom, as the love of men and women for one another, should be constrained and bound by laws, seems peculiarly revolting. There have been far more indignant protests against the immorality and tyranny of marriage laws than against any other kind of law. If Jesus was going to make an exception to his ordinary rule of dealing only with the inner attitude of mind and not with the external act, why did he make that exception here of all places ?

Perhaps the answer to that question is that Jesus drew the external consequences of the inner truth here just because the relation

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of the two is here so difficult and disputed. However that be, let us begin by recognising that although law takes into account historical conditions and social utility, these are not all the things it takes into account. Morality at any rate is concerned with the application to historical conditions of the universal principles which Jesus lays down, and the principles therefore come into it as much as the historical conditions. It makes nonsense of the teaching of Jesus to set on one side his teaching about inner motives and the personal life, and, on the other hand, as something quite unconnected and independent, external moral conduct. What he is saying, for example, about murder is that the essential evil which produces it is hatred, but that implies that hatred is the

essence of murder. There is a real connexion between hate and murder, though hate is unlikely to lead to murder unless there are aiding external circumstances. What matters if we really wish to bring about God's Kingdom on earth is to see that there are external ways of behaving which almost certainly encourage internal states of mind, good or evil. There are external ways of behaving which imply the acceptance of evil states of mind, and clearly this applies as much to sexual morality as to anything else. There is, then, a very real connexion between inner states of mind and the ways of life we establish. Consider, then, what I called in the last address the historical moral context of Jesus' teaching. Does it not give us some understanding of Jesus' view of marriage?

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Clearly the assumption that women are to be regarded, not as persons or individuals in their own right, but as means only for the gratification of men's sexual desires or for their utility, was stamped upon the Mosaic law which he is criticising. Jesus is in effect saying, "Moses set some limits to your right to regard women as your property and to get rid of them when you are tired of them or have no further use for them or when they are childless. Moses said there must be a certain amount of decency about it. You must give them a writing of divorcement. But I say the whole thing is wrong. You have under no circumstances a right to dispose of women in that way, whatever the excuse may be." According to the accepted version in Matthew, he made one

exception, allowed one excuse. According to the version in Mark and Luke, He allowed no excuse. The view that "save for fornication" is a late addition seems to me probable. It is like Jesus to say, "The whole thing is wrong." For the whole thing implied this attitude of men to women which is the real evil—the root of trouble.

If this interpretation is correct, what Jesus was denouncing was the fact of the man having this power over the woman and of men holding this view of women. He was denouncing all that divorce must mean whilst this power and this view held. And we need not necessarily suppose that if this evil is avoided, the prohibition of any kind of divorce must still remain unchanged. What does remain is the ideal of marriage



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as a lifelong partnership. A possibility of divorce is not a repudiation of that ideal, but the giving the power of divorce into the hands of the man is. No institution as an institution can be ideal. Some institutions make possible or even encourage the ideal, others deliberately deny it (divorce in the hands of the man, for example).

There is thus a connexion between the ideal relationship and the institution, however true it may be that an institution which ought to foster an ideal relationship may be perverted. The justification, for instance, of the Church's condemnation of polygamy is not that monogamous marriages are all ideal and polygamous the opposite, but that in polygamy a man definitely commits himself to a course of behaviour and to relations

which shut out the very possibility of ideal equal relations between men and women. Its basic assumptions are wrong.

Questions of that sort, why polygamy is wrong as an institution, and what laws (assuming the Christian ideal of marriage) there ought to be about divorce, seem to me to be comparatively simple. I don't mean they are not controversial. Our judgement as to what marriage laws will in effect hinder or foster the ideal of marriage, will depend partly on our estimate of human nature and of the effects of law upon it. These are matters on which men are bound to differ. But the principles involved seem to me simple. What is more difficult and more important is to see why the principle of the right relation between men and women

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implied in verse 28, which I discussed in the last address, implies this ideal of marriage, a permanent, normally indissoluble partnership between a man and a woman. We are bound at this time to feel this difficulty with peculiar force, and that for a very important reason. The difficulties of Christian teaching have been increased by its success. In earlier times, as we saw before, it was assumed that a woman had to belong to some man. Women could not be independent, and binding marriage laws and the forbidding of sexual relations outside marriage were necessary to defend the position of women. The reverse side of this, of course, was that relations of any kind between men and women were confined within the circle of the family—a position

described in the epigram in *Diana of the Crossways*: "Men have rounded Seraglio Point, they have not yet doubled Cape Turk."

Nowadays we have arrived at a higher state of society, where women have acquired an independence which they never had before, and where therefore there can be and are relations of friendship and comradeship between men and women, especially young men and young women, which did not exist before—a great and memorable achievement of the last hundred years in Western Society. This, however, means that the non-moral sanctions—the social and economic sanctions—of traditional marriage have largely disappeared. We shall therefore only hold on to Christian marriage if we

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value it, and not only some of its consequences. We are in the position of Socrates at the beginning of the second book of the *Republic*. The consequences and accidents of the ideal must be given up. It stands, if it stands, for itself.

Now, if we face this, and if we grant what I argued last time, that the real evil in the relations of men and women comes when either or each is treated as a means, a thing, an object, and not as a person, we need not trouble ourselves about those forms of sexual relation (from prostitution to marriages of mere convenience and utility) which on this principle are clearly wrong : because at the moment we are not concerned with how we are to find strength to resist temptation and do what is right, nor with

what laws or forms of social pressure will aid men in keeping the ideal. Just now we are trying to discover what is the ideal. I am sure that is the difficulty of many people to-day. The old obvious sanctions having gone, the social relations of men and women having so enormously changed, ought there not, many people say, to be a new ideal? May we not be coming to new relations between men and women, quite different from but far finer than any ideal we could have conceived earlier? Quite certainly some men and women who behave in a way which is very shocking to the more orthodox, are just as serious as the orthodox ever have been in trying to follow an ideal : only they quite genuinely think that the Christian ideal of marriage is antiquated and

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statement is true. Such relations are quite different from merely casual or merely utilitarian sex relations. If they are based on a mistaken ideal, they may be genuinely based on an ideal.)

The supporters of this ideal—to resume the argument—would no doubt admit that there are often social disadvantages and difficulties in carrying out the consequences of this ideal: but, then, it may be argued that there are similar disadvantages in our imperfect society in realising any ideal human relations. In other cases of hardship in following ideal conduct we usually say that that is the fault of our imperfect society, and we agree that individuals may feel called upon to seek to realise the ideal themselves, and face the social disadvantages to

themselves, and even to others, in the hope that their example may make the ideal come more quickly. And if the romantic ideal is the true ideal of marriage, the same will hold. At any rate, what we are concerned with is to understand what is the ideal. The consequences we had agreed, like Socrates in the *Republic*, to neglect.

It is clear that this romantic ideal is quite inconsistent with Christian marriage. For romantic love, it is universally admitted, comes and goes. When it goes, the ideal would imply that the relationship should cease, and when it comes again between different persons, new unions would be formed. It is quite incompatible with life-long obligation. It is even incompatible with undertaking the obligations of a family.



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Some of those, of course, who uphold it, quite genuinely think the family a bad institution, and think the responsibilities of children should be assumed by the State.

Its obvious defect as an ideal is its irresponsibility: it removes itself from the actualities and obligations of every day. The pull of the ordinary needs of every day, of the family and of common life, are so strong that, in practice, the romantic marriage has to exist alongside of the utilitarian marriage—men and women trying both kinds of union, neither being in itself satisfactory. For the romantic ideal is based on only one side of the practical teaching of Jesus. It accepts the principle that the flesh can be the vehicle of the spirit, and that we must do all that in us lies to see

that we make it so, and do not in perversion make the spirit serve the flesh. So far there is a real connexion between the romantic ideal and the principle involved in verse 28. But the ideal neglects the other side of Christ's teaching, which is expressed in the saying: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it," or in the putting of the commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" *after* the first and greatest commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." What can that have to do with the relations of men and women in marriage? This. This principle, when applied to that relation, gives an ideal which stands between two—as it seems to me—defective and inferior ideals, the utilitarian and the romantic marriage—the utilitarian marriage which

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exists all for something outside itself, and the romantic marriage which exists for nothing beyond itself. In the one, marriage is looked on as simply for the procreation of children, or as a convenient and serviceable arrangement for purposes outside itself : in the other, marriage is regarded as a relationship absolutely worth while for its own sake and not passing over into anything else—not overflowing necessarily into relations with other people. \* That the teaching of Jesus condemns the first, I have already shown. We are not to use others as merely means and instruments. \* Marriage should be an entirely mutual relation : a relation of mutual service ; and its basis is the love and delight of each in the other.

The emotion of being in love is given us to learn such mutual service. But if we stop there and occupy ourselves only with that emotion and only with mutual delight, we are doing the other thing which is wrong. We shall sooner or later fall into that perversion of desire of which I talked in the last address. Christian marriage is a persistent and natural institution because of its connexion with the family : because a man and woman, coming together for mutual assistance and mutual delight, find themselves led on, when children come, to the love and service of others. There is no need to labour all that the child stands for, but it is worth while pointing out the universality of the principle involved. We find ourselves only when we devote ourselves to something beyond us.

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To be concerned much with ourselves is to be small and mean and not worth much. So in our relations with one another we are given that delight in those we love that we may share with them a common task in which we reach beyond ourselves. And if we try to seize this delight and stop at each other, the delight will soon wither. The principle which is most clearly exemplified in the family, in the relation of a husband and wife to one another and to their children, applies to the marriage where there are no children. Once mutual love occupies itself with itself, it almost inevitably becomes a common selfishness, when all that makes true love worth while is gone and love in any form is not likely to last, and permanent ties become an intolerable obligation. For such

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a relationship has no roots. But if the love of a man and a woman is allowed to go out in service and devotion to something other than themselves, or than each other, then the comradeship will increase the love and the love the comradeship, and the love will carry them through the hard places of the obligation, and the demands of the obligation accepted in love will carry them through the ups and downs in the emotion. The close, intimate, long-standing relationship of Christian marriage provides a sheltered place where the intimate uniqueness of human personality can develop : where each can be entirely him- or her-self. Because each has that continual support to be him- or her-self, each can bring to service his or her own unique contribution ; and,

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on the other hand, because each serves something other than the personal, each personality can go on being enriched from the world outside.

I am quite sure that such a relationship can be far more wonderful than can any romantic marriage—not *because* it is more lasting, but because of the mutual understanding and intimacy which come from the lastingness. It is not possible without security—that is, it is not possible without the mutual acceptance of permanent obligation—and that means that it is not possible without faith, without a trust that if we commit ourselves to the ideal, God is with us and will carry us through. But, then, no really great things in life are possible on any other terms.

“ To enter on a true marriage we have to have a trust in the implicit promises of life ; we have to exercise faith so that these may have time and soil in which to grow. Friends know that what they most want to say to each other cannot be shot out, but requires its own time and manner of approach ; and even more is it so with what one life has to say to another. We need time and we need security, profound inner security and such outer security as shall hinder hindrances to inner quiet and trust of spirit. But many of us to-day lack both the outer and the inner conditions which are friendly to true marriage. Hindrances to the good life are not being hindered. Danger, rush,



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ugliness are outside ; and over-mechanisation and over-specialisation have disintegrated the individual life. The impulse towards wholeness of vision and of will is hampered and starved. We are restless and sick at heart, and it is not wonderful that while such conditions prevail, some may think :

“ ‘ To amend their lot by renouncing life vows,  
As a vain bondage perverse of happiness.’

“ And these might seem wise in their generation if there were not eternal laws in which our life was set,

“ ‘ And could man separate brutal from spiritual,  
and in things of the flesh live as animals do  
stealing their food and seizing the delight of  
the hour,  
that were reasonable enough and might be wise  
in man ;

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but such divorcement being in the provision of  
things  
shut out, there is no way left nor choice for him,  
unless  
he would make shipwreck, and of mere brutality  
fall to pieces—there is no hope for him but to attune  
nature's diversity to a human harmony,  
and with faith in his hope and full courage of soul  
realizing his will at one with all nature,  
devise a spiritual ethic for conduct in life.' ” \*

I have confined myself to setting out what  
seems to me the ideal of Christian marriage.  
I am quite aware that when we come to ask  
how this ideal is to be realised—what laws  
should be and what common morality and  
moral opinion ought to be—there are all  
sorts of problems to be considered. Our  
ideal of Christian marriage has been in the  
past mixed up with all sorts of imperfections,  
and it may well be that our newly-won

\* *The Christian Life*, Vol. I, Chap. 5.

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gains in the relations of men and women should bring with them changes in law and changes in moral opinion and convention. But I am sure that we cannot approach questions of that kind with any success, unless we first understand and care for the ideal, and realise that no great things in life can be got except on conditions : cannot be got without costing or without faith.

THE END

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